

Digital Voter Registration: 2026 Update

An addendum to the UK Democracy Fund Digital How To Guide

By David Norton

This addendum updates the [2025 Digital Voter Registration How To Guide](#), incorporating evidence-based best practices in digital advertising and insights from digital voter registration campaigns ahead of the 2026 elections, specifically drawing upon findings from two UK Democracy Fund grantees: My Life My Say and Shout Out UK.¹ It notes relevant changes to platform policy, advertising costs and forthcoming amendments to electoral law. Note that findings relating to click-through performance are supported by comparative testing within live campaigns. Findings relating to completed registrations are not, as the final step of the journey is not currently observable to campaigns. Nothing here constitutes legal advice.

The digital journey, two years on

Digital campaigning moves quickly, and the two years since the 2024 general election have been no exception. New platform rules and changes in how the platforms decide who sees your adverts have both changed what a voter registration campaign looks like in practice.

The journey itself has not changed: someone notices your ad, clicks it, lands on gov.uk/register-to-vote, sequences through the online registration form, and, if all goes well, ends up on the register. What has changed is where to focus within the part of the user journey you control.

Advertising convention has long been to define an audience narrowly and make adverts tailored to it. The logic behind that still holds (different people of course do respond to different messages) but you are no longer the one doing the sorting, as platforms like Meta and TikTok decide who sees each advert impression, and which version of it, finding people resembling those who already responded to it. Evidence suggests narrowing audiences in advance costs you: broad national targeting tends to beat targeting town by town, and independent A/B testing also suggests moving away from demographic or interest-based segmentation.² As a result, the development of creative is increasingly important: give the platform a wide audience and a large and varied set of adverts, and the algorithm will efficiently work out which ones belong in front of which people.

¹ Joshua Carrington, "[How To Guide: Digital Voter Registration](#)", UK Democracy Fund, March 2025.

² On this shift from interest targeting to broad audiences, see Alex Neiman, "[Meta Advantage+ Audience vs. Detailed Targeting in 2026](#)", alexneiman.com, 1 June 2026; and Adligator Team, "[Meta Broad Targeting 2026](#)", Adligator, 10 April 2026.

This principle has a practical impact on your production plan: you need more adverts, and more different kinds of adverts, than you may have budgeted for before. Further, both My Life My Say and Shout Out UK developed their creative assets in collaboration with young people, and that is where their best-performing adverts came from. Stage one of this addendum sets out how both campaigns went about that, including what co-design looked like in practice. Stage two addresses targeting: where to stay broad, when a separate campaign is worth the money, and what both campaigns paid per click in 2024 and 2026.

This addendum follows the registration journey in order. A short section on what to settle before launch comes first, then one for each stage: getting adverts noticed, driving clicks, and finally the choices available between the click and the completed form.

Before you start

A few factors affect what and how you can plan:

- **Officially, you cannot pay to promote registration content on TikTok.**³ Presently, only official bodies that run elections are allowed to promote voter registration. Treat TikTok as an organic and creator channel and do not plan on building a paid initiative around it. Shout Out UK has had paid content approved by focusing on education and political literacy rather than content appealing to register to vote. This has worked for them, but whether an asset clears moderation is highly variable, as the rules are inconsistently applied.
- **Build approval into your timeline.** Advertiser authorisation and ad review on platforms like Meta and Google both take time, and an asset held up for review close to a deadline risks losing time it needs to run, learn and settle before the moment you want it spending at scale. Avoid partisan language that can trigger automated moderation (and charity law risk, if relevant). Shout Out UK found in 2026 that a named contact in the right team at the social media platform got wrongly rejected content reinstated far faster than automated appeals.
- **Put new creative live well before your deadline.** My Life My Say launched adverts on National Voter Registration Day which underperformed compared to the rest of the campaign. This was because the adverts were still in the platform's learning phase when the campaign began spending at scale. Allow several days before any key moment, and ideally two weeks if your schedule permits (note: you can always

³ TikTok, "[Politics, Governments, and Elections](#)", TikTok Advertising Policies, last updated July 2026. The policy is global and applies in the UK. TikTok does "not allow paid political advertising across any of our monetization features", and "references to an upcoming or current election or referendum, including appeals for votes, voter registration, and promoting participation, are prohibited for all other advertisers". The only exception is government bodies overseeing elections, which must first be certified through a TikTok sales representative.

run an advert ahead of a key date to complete the learning phase, and then pause it before you fully scale).

- **Budget for the Meta levy.** In July 2026, Meta introduced a levy of 2% on UK advert spend, so build this into your budget for adverts on Facebook and Instagram.⁴
- **Check whether you need a digital imprint.** You can check if your material requires an imprint online using the Electoral Commission's [quick check tool](#). Most registration campaigns will not: the rule covers material promoting a party, candidate or referendum outcome, not non-partisan registration content, and the Representation of the People Bill is unlikely to change that. Some campaigns add one anyway for transparency and to safeguard against rule changes. Shout Out UK includes one for these reasons. The UK Democracy Fund also encourages its grantees to use a digital imprint for transparency reasons, even when not required to by law. Check the Electoral Commission's guidance before you run your advert campaign, in case the rules have changed.

Stage one: getting your adverts noticed

The platforms choose who sees your adverts, working from who has already responded to them. Your creative is the part you control, and the number of different adverts you run matters as much as how good any one of them is, because the platform will need options to test and choose between.

Brainstorm and iterate on creative with your target audience at the table

- **Recruit a focus group from the people you are trying to reach, not from civically active volunteers.** Highly engaged young people will give you adverts that appeal to other highly engaged young people, and those people have usually registered already.
- **Make adverts that suit how young people already use the platform.** Match the formats and the pace, speak the way they speak, and anchor the advert in something concrete they already think about. Abstract statements about the importance of democracy, for example, will get scrolled past.
- **Commission more creative than you intend to run.** Platform rejections, creative fatigue (oversaturating an audience), and testing all reduce the pool of usable assets. Shout Out UK's advice is that a campaign requiring 50 live assets should commission substantially more, and should budget for that attrition at the outset. They also note that rejected TikTok adverts can be repurposed for YouTube, as YouTube Shorts use similar sizing.

⁴ Meta, "[Location fees](#)", Meta Business Help Centre. Since 1 July 2026, Meta has charged a 2% fee on advertising delivered to UK audiences.

Insights from My Life My Say and Shout Out UK: Co-design in practice

Both campaigns workshoped their messaging with the audience they were seeking to reach rather than with their most engaged supporters.⁵ My Life My Say sought feedback on 2024's campaign messaging and updated creative, ensuring that adverts that ran in their test phase had first been properly reviewed. With Shout Out UK, focus groups also first responded to existing advertising creative, and then reviewed new mock-ups in detail. Only afterwards was anything committed to final production. This sequence resulted in savings, as weak concepts were identified before production money was spent.

What worked in 2026

Tell people what to do and why it matters to them, rather than why democracy matters. That was an earlier finding and it remains true in 2026: practical language tends to perform better than abstract with people who do not usually vote, and creative that speaks to young people's lives works better than appeals to civic duty.

Name a specific concern rather than a general one. My Life My Say's strongest advert in Scotland and Wales was "I GIVE AN X about MENTAL HEALTH", anchoring a single named concern rather than an abstract issue.

Keep the practical instruction in the body copy. Both of My Life My Say's best-performing assets included "it only takes 5 minutes on the government website" in the text, while the image drew attention.

Urgency and countdown formats continue to perform. Shout Out UK found that urgency-based adverts outperformed the other appeals they ran in 2026. Their #SeneddBound series counted down from One Month Left to Two Weeks Left to 24 Hours Left, each using a single clock, calendar or hourglass on a black background, with the deadline as the whole message.



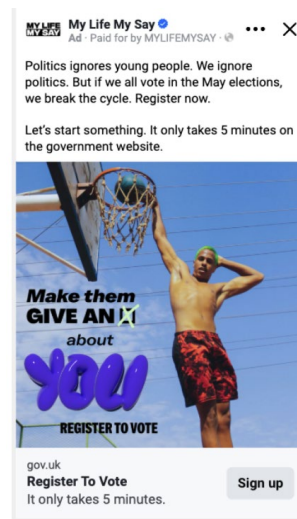
⁵ Shout Out UK found that compensating focus group participants fairly (e.g., at minimum the London Living Wage) helps ensure a broader and more diverse range of perspectives are brought to the table, and that co-design isn't dominated by hyper-engaged young people.

Video is now effectively a requirement. Stories, Reels and TikTok are built for motion, and static creative tends to compete poorly within them. The production bar, though, is much lower than it sounds: exporting a static image as a video file is often enough on its own (a video file does not require any actual movement), and slight movement (a slow zoom, a drifting background, a number ticking down) will also work. Animating static creative that has already performed well is a great place to start.

What a winning advert looked like

My Life My Say ran “give an X” adverts across the UK. In Scotland and Wales the winning advert spoke as the viewer and named something specific: “I GIVE AN X about MENTAL HEALTH”. In England the winning advert addressed the viewer: “Make them GIVE AN X about YOU”, over body copy that framed the problem collectively.

Both use a form of “social proof”: the England version describes what young people do as a group, and what would change if they did it together; the Scotland and Wales winner puts the message in a peer’s voice.



Stage two: driving clicks

Targeting used to mean deciding who, specifically, saw your adverts. It now means deciding how your campaigns are built around the people the platform finds. There are still key decisions you must make: how broad to go, how to split your campaigns, how to sequence your budget, and which platforms and placements you allocate budget to. Audience filters (age, interest, location) are better left to the platform (unless, of course, your campaign intervention is focused towards engaging a specific demographic). Stay broad on who sees your adverts. Splitting costs you efficiency, so only run separate campaigns when one group of adverts would otherwise get little or no spend because the platform finds cheaper clicks elsewhere in the same budget. In practice, this usually means splitting by language, or by region if even coverage matters to you.

- **Target nationally, but treat the devolved nations as separate campaigns.** Within a nation, avoid narrower geographic filters: the platform will find your audience more cheaply than a city list will. Across nations, the voting age differs (this is expected to change once 16-year-olds are universally eligible to vote), and with it the eligible audience, as well as the most effective message to reach them. Therefore, Wales and Scotland warrant their own campaigns, creative and budgets. Welsh-language

creative can extend reach in Wales at some additional cost: My Life My Say's best-performing Welsh-language advert cost approximately 20% more per click than their best-performing English-language advert delivered there (treat that as indicative rather than a benchmark though, as this test was small). Note that the narrower your target audience, the faster costs rise as you spend more. Once your advert has reached most of the people your targeting parameters allow, the platform starts showing the advert to the same people again, and repeat views convert worse than first-time views, so the average cost per click will climb.

- **Decide whether reaching a smaller audience matters enough to pay for it.** Left in a shared budget, adverts aimed at a small audience will typically be outspent by adverts aimed at a large one, because the larger audience tends to deliver cheaper results. Welsh-language creative in 2026 is a clear example of this. If the answer is yes, run that as a separate campaign to ensure delivery; if no, expect the adverts to go largely undelivered. This is worth watching whenever you are trying to reach a particular group who are harder to reach, like young care leavers, for example. An advert campaign specifying both a broad advert set and a narrow one will push its budget towards the broad one, because that is where it will yield the cheapest clicks. Therefore, reaching a specific and more underserved audience may require you to accept it will cost more.
- **Decide whether even coverage across the UK matters to you.** If it does, split your campaigns: left to itself, spend may concentrate in London and the other large cities. One campaign for Greater London and another for the rest of England will mitigate these effects, though it will tend to cost more.
- **Sequence your budget so the learning phase is over before you scale.** Allocating spend for adverts to run at scale just before a deadline still makes sense (voters register late!) but adverts first launched near the deadline will spend badly, because the platform has not yet worked out who to show them to. Run deadline creative early at low spend.
- **Leave placements to the platform.** Choosing them yourself is another kind of narrowing. It will tend to spend on Instagram Stories, which is where most click-throughs came from in 2024 and 2026.
- **Meta is the platform that scales best (primarily via Instagram for young people).** Shout Out UK, My Life My Say, and testing across the sector suggests that alternative platforms tend to underperform relative to Meta.⁶ Notably, TikTok performed better than Meta for Shout Out UK, but these results may not be

⁶ M+R, "[Advertising](#)", M+R Benchmarks 2026. Note that M+R's figures are US-based and cover fundraising and email list-building rather than voter registration, so they indicate relative social advertising platform efficiency rather than the costs a UK registration campaign should expect.

replicable as TikTok does not officially permit paid voter registration content, so it may not be relied upon at scale. A best practice is to run adverts across all of Meta and leave Advantage+ placements on, so the adverts can appear across Facebook and Instagram. The more placements available, the more auctions the delivery system can choose between, and the cheaper the results it can find. Restricting placements by hand narrows that choice and usually costs you.⁷

What a click costs now

The table below puts the two cycles side by side. Use it to sense-check your budget rather than as a target.

	2024 clicks	2024 cost per click (CPC)	2026 clicks	2026 cost per click (CPC)	Change
My Life My Say	321,045	£0.47	29,436	£0.34	–28%
Shout Out UK	451,325	£0.36	224,581	£0.31	–14%

Both campaigns came in below their 2024 cost per click. Advertising typically gets more expensive during a general election as demand for the same advertising space rises sharply, and prices rise with it.

Stage three: from click to completed form

Options to consider: both campaigns linked straight to gov.uk; the routes below are set out for campaigns weighing the alternatives, rather than as findings from 2026.

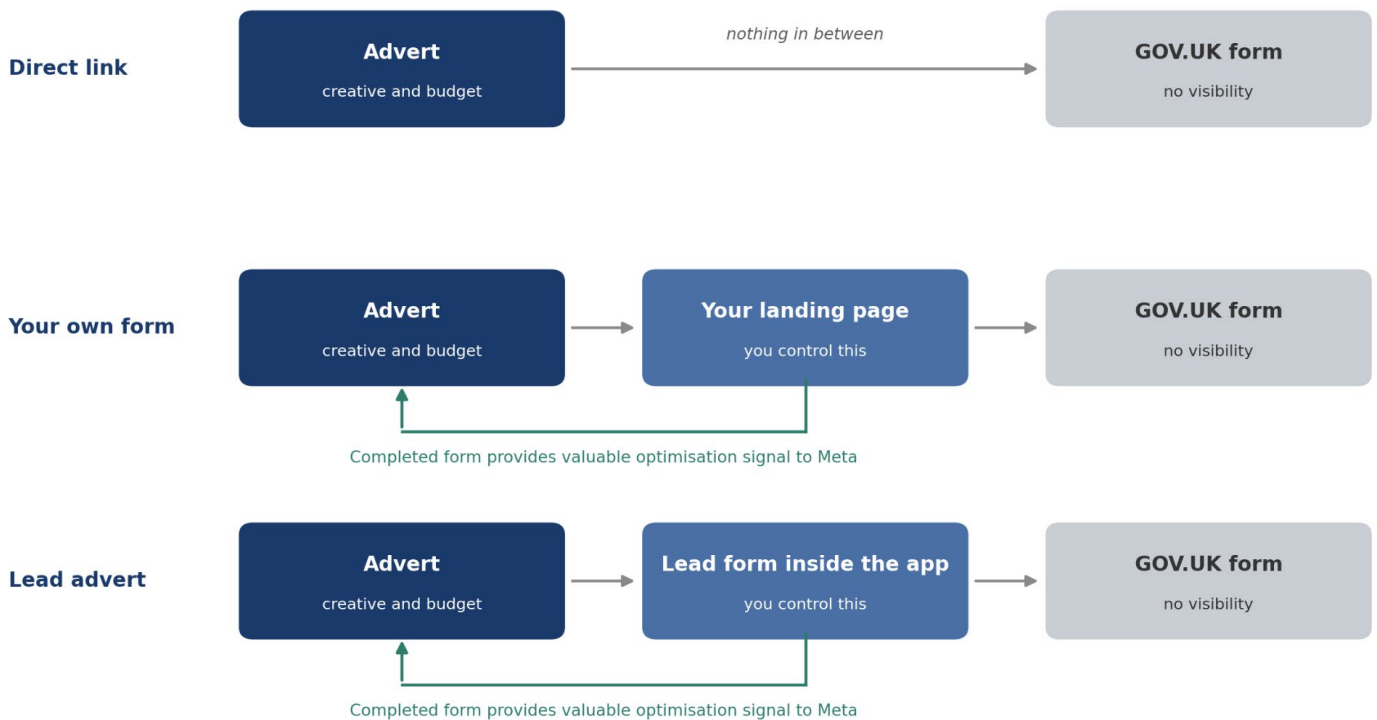
Up to this point everything has been about reducing cost per click, because that is the final number the platforms provide. Targeting more broadly, running more creative and sequencing your budget properly will all bring your cost per click down. Clicks are a proxy, though, for what we actually want: a newly-registered voter. The click to gov.uk is the last thing in this process we can measure.

The decision at this step is different, because it is the one point where you can choose to collect and measure something else. Linking straight to gov.uk means clicks, and their cost, stay your only metric. An alternative approach is to route people through an intermediary campaign landing page to fill out a form you control (to collect their email address), and then send people to gov.uk. That approach will result in fewer people routed to gov.uk, but there are upsides too. Lead form adverts provide a potential workaround (as a lower-friction way to collect contact details).

⁷ Meta, “[About Ad Placements Across Meta Technologies](#)”, Meta Business Help Centre.

Three routes from advert to GOV.UK

An intermediary step increases friction, but also boosts advert targeting efficiency and creates a means for follow-up.



Sending people through your own campaign form first

Putting your own page in front of gov.uk adds friction and loses you some people. In return it gives you two things that a direct link (from your advert directly to gov.uk) cannot:

- **A conversion signal.** A Meta Pixel or Conversions API event embedded on your page's form trains the platform's algorithm to look for people likely to complete the form rather than those who only click.
- **A way to follow up.** Contact details let you send reminder prompts and get-out-the-vote messages later.

Instagram and Facebook lead form adverts

Lead adverts are the low-friction version of the same idea. The form opens inside Facebook or Instagram rather than on a webpage of your own, and the fields fill themselves in from the person's profile, so you lose far fewer people at that step. You still get contact details and a conversion event, and people go on to gov.uk from there.

1. The advert appears in the feed

The advertisement is displayed in a mobile app feed. It features a purple header with the 'YV' logo and the text 'Your Vote Project Sponsored'. Below this, a message reads: 'Not registered yet? It only takes 5 minutes. Leave your email and we'll send you the link and a reminder before the deadline.' The main body of the ad has a purple background with the text 'Make them listen to you' in white and yellow. Below this, it says 'Register to vote before the deadline'. At the bottom, there is a white bar with the URL 'yourvoteproject.org', the text 'Get a registration reminder', and a 'Sign up' button. Below the bar are three buttons: 'Like', 'Comment', and 'Share'.



2. Tapping "Sign up" opens a pre-filled form

The pre-filled form is titled 'Your Vote Project' and 'Get your registration link and a deadline reminder'. It explains: 'We'll email you the official gov.uk link now and remind you before registration closes.' The form contains three input fields: 'Full name' (David Norton, Pre-filled), 'Email' (david.norton@example.com, Pre-filled), and 'Postcode' (CF10 1AA, Pre-filled). Below these fields, a note states: 'By submitting, you agree to Your Vote Project contacting you about voter registration. [Privacy policy](#)'. A large purple 'Submit' button is at the bottom.

Lead form adverts capture email addresses that can be followed up with at very low cost.

The catch is that submitting a lead form adds a step, because the person still has to complete the gov.uk journey. Note that you take on data protection obligations for anything you collect, so retention needs handling properly. Neither grantee has tested this for voter registration, so how it compares is not yet known.

What to do about it

If you have limited capacity and a short window, link straight to gov.uk, as it is the lowest-risk option and there is nothing to build. If you have a longer runway, it is worth testing your own form or a lead advert against a direct-link control. The question is not whether friction loses you immediate traffic to gov.uk (it will). It is whether a conversion signal and a follow-up list are worth more than the referrals you lose. Nobody in this sector has answered that.

Where this leaves you

Your task is to build a journey from someone noticing an advert to becoming a registered voter, and each campaign decision should serve that end. Start with the parts you can control: develop varied creative with the people you want to reach, give the platform a broad audience, and allow time for testing before you scale. Use separate, targeted adverts where necessary to ensure that cheaper clicks elsewhere do not crowd out the people your campaign exists to reach. Then weigh the simplest route to registration against the value of collecting contact details and following up, testing that trade-off where capacity allows. The evidence from 2026 gives campaigns a firmer basis for getting people to the registration form; the next challenge is to establish what helps them complete it.

Addendum prepared in September 2026 by David Norton for the UK Democracy Fund

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